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ABSTRACT

A survey of the status of language usage in Somalia begins with an overview of the usage patterns of Somali, the official language, and three languages previously used officially: English, Italian, and Arabic. The cultural context that for many years has supported the usage of a single native language for communication and administration is also described. A matrix follows that rates these four languages on: (1) their usage rating using State Department classifications; (2) increase and decrease trends by the year 2000; (3) chief of state use in addressing the populace; (4) use in armed forces, government, court, and diplomatic communications, written and oral; (5) use as a language of instruction or required language in higher education, on the secondary and elementary levels, and in adult education; (6) use in the popular press, radio and television broadcasting, and film; (7) business and professional use, written and oral; (8) use in intellectual circles; (9) the alphabet situation; (10) the status of indigenous literature; (11) use in public signs and notices; and (12) the availability of instructional materials and dictionaries in the native languages for use in English as a second language. Explanatory notes give the number and population percentages using the languages, the type of alphabet used, and specific instructional material titles. A selected bibliography is also included. (MSE)

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Language/Area Reference Center

COUNTRY STATUS REPORT:

SOMALIA

June 1984

Prepared by:

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Center for Applied Linguistics/LARC
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June, 1984
Somalia - 1, Overview

Unique among the countries of sub-saharan Africa, Somalia has a virtually homogeneous population, 95% of which speaks Somali as a native language. Even the dialect differentiation is not a serious obstacle, since one dialect, Common or Standard Somali, has been used for some time all over Somali territories as a language of wider communication. English and Italian were the official languages of Somalia prior to 1972; and Arabic, because of Somalia's Muslim heritage, is still used officially, especially along the eastern coast.

Political squabbles impeded the choice of a script for written Somali for many years, but in 1972 when the roman script was finally chosen and Somali made the official language of state, the decision was thoroughly and vigorously implemented. All civil servants were given three months to pass an exam in written Somali; after the initial three months, all oral and written proceedings of the state were to be in that language.

The use of Somali now pervades all phases of public life in Somalia; it is the language of administration, armed forces, the courts and the media (although not exclusively in the latter). Officially-designated experts have worked steadily since 1972 to create the terminology which would make Somali suitable as a language for school subjects, law, technology and administration. As a result of their efforts, Somali is now the medium of instruction in all pre-university education, although English and Arabic are still taught in required courses in primary and secondary schools, and special intensive courses are offered in Italian for those secondary school students entering university faculties where Italian is the medium of instruction. Higher education is either English- or Italian-medium, yet plans are underway to somalize the university as well, and the necessary Somali texts and materials that will enable such a change are either at press or in preparation presently.

The success of the somalization process is due to the relative homogeneity of the Somali population, but only in part. Two additional factors have contributed to its success: Somalis of all backgrounds are intensely proud of their language, and Somali society is inherently egalitarian (Somalis do not commonly divide themselves along class lines and make use of symbols to mark their status). Because the use of colonial languages has never been a status marker in Somalia as it has in other developing countries where a foreign language has been used officially, the diminished status of English and Italian has not been a threat to the educated minority. In fact, the somalization program has served to link the general public and the school-going public in ways impossible in countries where the language of education and administration is foreign. It has worked in such a way that language is not and will not be a political issue in the future.

Because the Somalis hold their language in such high esteem, the October, 1972 decree to make Somali the official language was not resisted. As a result of the ensuing campaign to spread literacy, Somalia has progressed from practically 0% literacy in Somali and low literacy levels in the foreign languages to a very high rate of literacy in Somali, most notably among the nomads of the interior. While opposition to the present regime in Mogadishu is widespread and becoming well-organized, political changes, when and if they occur, are not likely to alter a firmly-entrenched and widely-accepted language policy.

SOMALIA

Languages

Factoids	Somali	Arabic	English	Italian
1. Usage rating*	1	2	-	-
2. Increase/decrease	2	-	-	-
3. Chief of State use?	1	0	0	0
4. Armed Forces/written	1	0	0	0
5. Armed Forces/oral	1	0	0	0
6. Government/written	1	0	0	0
7. Government/oral, national	1	0	0	0
8. Government/oral, local	1	0	0	0
9. Court/written	1	0	0	0
10. Court/oral	1	0	0	0
11. Diplomatic use?	0	1	1	1
12. Higher education	1	1	1	1
13. Higher ed: required?	?	?	?	?
14. Secondary education	1	0	0	0
15. Secondary: required?	1	1	1	1
16. Primary education	1	0	0	0
17. Primary: required?	1	1	1	0
18. Adult education	1	0	0	0
19. Popular press use	2	2	2	2
20. Transmission across borders?	1	0	0	0
21. Use in radio broadcasting	1	2	2	2
22. Use in TV broadcasting	2	2	2	2
23. Use in film	1	0	1	0
24. Business/professional/written	1	0	0	0
25. Business/professional/oral	1	2	2	2
26. Use in intellectual circles	1	0	2	2
27. Alphabet situation*	1	1	1	1
28. Status of literature	2	3	?	?
29. Use in signs?	1	0	0	0
30. Teaching materials*	2	2	-	-
31. Bilingual dictionaries*	2	2	-	-

Notes:

Matrix figures are explained on following pages

? = information unavailable within time frame of project

- = not applicable

FOOTNOTES

1. 1984 ESTIMATES, NUMBERS OF NATIVE SPEAKERS

Language	Number of native speakers	Percentage of population
Somali	5,035,000	95%
Arabic	-	-
English	-	-
Italian	-	-

27. TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

Language	Alphabet
Somali	Roman
Arabic	Arabic
English	Roman
Italian	Roman

30. TEACHING MATERIALS FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Somali	Ahmed, Shirre Jama and Charles Kozoll. An Elementary Somali Drill Book. New York, NY: Peace Corps Training Program, Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1966. Pia, J. Joseph, Paul D. Black and M.I. Samates. Beginning in Somali. Rev. ed. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, Program of Eastern African Studies, 1966. Dames, J.J. The Spelling of The Somali Language in The Roman Script. Nairobi, Kenya: Literacy Centre of Kenya, 1968.
Arabic (Modern Standard)	Abboud, Peter F. et al. Elementary Modern Standard Arabic, Parts I and II. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Department of Near Eastern Studies, 1975-76. . Modern Standard Arabic; Intermediate Level: Parts I-III. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Department of Near Eastern and North African Studies, 1972. Azmi, Sanaa and Belkacem Baccouche. Conversations in Modern Standard Arabic. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984.
Arabic (Somali)	No texts available

31. DICTIONARIES FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Somali	Abraham, Roy Clive. English-Somali Dictionary. London: University of London Press, 1967.
	. Somali-English Dictionary. London: University of London Press, 1964.
	Axmed F. Cali. The Modern English-Somali Phrase-book. Mogadishu: Wakaaladda Madbacadda Qaranka, 1975.
Arabic (Modern Standard)	al-Ba'albaki, Munir. Al-Mawrid. A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary, 16th ed. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al 'ilm lil Mabayin, 1982.
	Wehr, Hans. Arabic-English Dictionary. Edited by J. Milton Cowan, 1977.
	al-Karmi, Hasan S. al-Manar; English Arabic Dictionary. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972.
Arabic (Somali)	No dictionaries available

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UNICEF. Country Kit: Somalia. Feature 7: "Education on The Move." Nairobi, Kenya: UNICEF Eastern Africa Regional Office, 1979.

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - a

1. Usage rating, using the State Department classifications
   1: Official language, most widely used.
   2: Official language, not most widely used.
   3: Widely used language, but not official. (Over 10% of population)
   4: Unofficial language used by significant minority (but less than 3)
   5: Unofficial language used by influential minority
   FOOTNOTE: NUMBERS OF SPEAKERS, PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

2. Increase/decrease trends by the year 2000
   1: Number of native speakers will increase in proportion
   2: Number of native speakers will remain proportionally constant
   3: Number of native speakers will decrease in proportion

3. Chief of State use, in addressing populace: YES (1) NO (0)

4. Armed Forces written communications
   1: Only language used in official communiques
   2: One of the languages used in official communiques
   0: Not used in official communiques

5. Armed Forces oral communications
   1: Used on all levels
   2: Used among officers only
   3: Used among multi-lingual NCO's and troops
   4: Used among monolingual troops only
   0: Not used

6. Written government communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used in official communications

7. Oral government communications/national level
   1: Official language spoken in national assembly
   2: One of the official languages spoken in national assembly
   0: Not used in government

8. Oral government communications/local level
   1: Official language in local government
   2: One of the official languages used in local government
   3: Allowed in local government proceedings, translated into official language
   0: Not used in local government

9. Court use in written communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - b

10. Court use in oral communications
    1: Only official language used in court
    2: One of the official languages used in court
    3: Allowed in courts, translated into official language(s)
    0: Not used in courts

11. Diplomatic use in notes to other countries: YES (1) NO (0)

12. Use in higher education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used

13. Language taught as subject in required courses in higher education:
    YES (1) NO (0)

14. Use in secondary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

15. Language taught as subject in required courses on secondary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

16. Use in primary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

17. Language taught as subject in required courses on primary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

18. Language use in adult education
    1: Used in oral and written technical instruction
    2: Used in oral and written life skills instruction
    3: Used in oral life skills instruction
    4: Used in literacy classes only
    0: Not used in adult informal education

19. Language use in popular press
    1: Used in publications throughout country
    2: Used in centrally-based publications with national distribution
    3: Used only in regional and local publications
    4: Used in clandestine publications only
    0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - c

20. Language used in radio/TV transmission across national borders?
YES (1) NO (0)

21. Language use in radio broadcasting
1: Language used broadcasting thoughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national broadcasts
3: Language used in local broadcasting only
3: Language used in clandestine broadcasting only
0: Language not used in radio broadcasting

22. Language use in TV broadcasting
1: Language used in telecasting throughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national telecasting
3: Language used regional and local telecasting only
0: Language not used in TV

23. Language use in film
1: Language used in indigenous film-making
2: Foreign-language films dubbed/subtitled into language
0: Language not used in films

24. Business/Professional use - written
1: Sole official language in business and professional communications
2: One of the official languages in business and professional communication
0: Not used

25. Business/Professional use - oral
1: Used in trade and commerce throughout country
2: Used in national trade and commerce only
3: Used only in local trade and commerce

26. Language use in intellectual circles
1: Language used in indigenous scholarly publications
2: Language used in formal scholarly discussion
0: Language not used

27. Alphabet situation
1: Established standardized alphabet exists.
2: Alphabet developed, no standardization
3: Competing alphabets exist
0: No alphabet exists
FOOTNOTE: TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

28. Status of indigenous literature
1: Established written tradition exists
2: Literature tradition emerging
3: Popular literature exists
0: No written literature exists

29. Language used in official public signs, notices: YES (1) NO (0)

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - d

30. Teaching materials for English speakers
    1: Wide range of teaching materials exists
    2: Narrow range of teaching materials exists
    0: No teaching materials exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

31. Dictionaries for English speakers
    1: Wide range of bilingual dictionaries exists
    2: Narrow range of dictionaries exists
    0: No dictionaries exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY